

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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TAGS: PFOR, BG, IN, PK

SUBJECT: REACTIONS TO INDO-PAKISTAN AGREEMENT

1. SUMMARY: BENGALLEES PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY HAVE GREETED THE SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION OF THE INDO-PAK TALKS WITH A MIXTURE OF SATISFACTION AND RELIEF. IN THE AGREEMENT MUJIB SAVED ENOUGH OF HIS PRINCIPLES TO STAVE OFF LOCAL CRITICS. CARRYING OUT ITS RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER THE ACCORD WILL PROVE MOST DIFFICULT FOR BDG AND DELAYS AND MISUNDERSTANDING SHOULD BE ANTICIPATED. WITH WAR CRIMES TRIALS GRADUALLY DECLINING IN DOMESTIC POLITICAL IMPORTANCE AND WITH MANY BENGALLEES HOPING TO REACH AN UNDERSTANDING WITH PAKISTAN, PROSPECTS FOR CONTINUED PROGRESS ARE REASONABLY GOOD. END SUMMARY.

2. THE PRESS, OFFICIALS, AND PRIVATE CITIZENS HAVE GREETED THE NEW DELHI AGREEMENT WITH A MIXTURE OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SATISFACTION AND RELIEF. THE BENGALI AND ENGLISH PRESS,

EVEN THOSE PAPERS NORMALLY CRITICAL OF GOVERNMENT POLICY, HAVE EXPRESSED ALMOST UNIFORM PRAISE OF BDG FLEXIBILITY IN ITS ENTIRETY TO MEAN PAKISTAN HAS EFFECTIVELY ACCORDED RECOGNITION. OFFICIAL PRONOUNCEMENTS, INCLUDING STATEMENTS BY MUJIB AND THE FOREIGN MINISTER, HAVE BEEN LIMITED TO GENERAL EXPRESSIONS OF PLEASURE. THERE HAS BEEN NO COMMENT ON THE DETAILS OF ACCORD, ITS IMPLEMENTATION, OR PLANS FOR FURTHER SUBCONTINENT NEGOTIATIONS.

3. OPINIONS EXPRESSED PRIVATELY BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND INFLUENTIAL PRIVATE CITIZENS ARE MORE SUBSTANTIVE. THE ACCORD IS REGARDED AS A POSITIVE STEP, AND SO GENERAL IS SATISFACTION THAT OPPOSITION PARTIES, DISSIDENT AWAMI LEAGUE POLITICIANS, AND OTHERS WILL FIND LITTLE SYMPATHY FOR THEIR ATTACKS. THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST PARTY (JSD) AND THE NATIONAL AWAMI PARTY (BHASHANI) HAVE PUBLICLY EXPRESSED RESERVATIONS. THE SHEIKH CAN DEFEND HIMSELF AGAINST MOST COMERS. TO THOSE WHO WANTED A TOUGH LINE HE CAN SHOW HE HAS NOT YIELDED PRINCIPLE. MUJIB WILL ARGUE AS HE DID ON AUGUST 29 THAT HE HAS REDEEMED HIS PLEDGE TO BRING BACK BENGALLEES FROM PAKISTAN WITHOUT GIVING UP RIGHT TO CONDUCT TRIALS FOR "GENOCIDE AND WAR CRIMES". MUJIB ALSO MAY CONVINCINGLY MAINTAIN THAT HE HAS DEFENDED THE PRINCIPLE OF SOVEREIGN EQUALITY. TO THOSE WHO WANT FLEXIBILITY THE AGREEMENT SPEAKS FOR ITSELF. THE PROMISE OF IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN, AND CHINA POSSIBLE AND THE REPATRIATION OF BENGALLEES LARGELY ACCOUNT FOR PUBLIC SATISFACTION. AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF RISING ANTI-INDIAN FEELING IN BANGLADESH, MANY BENGALLEES IN AND OUT OF GOVERNMENT GENUINELY LOOK FORWARD TO IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN FOR THE COUNTER-WEIGHT, PAKISTAN COULD BRING TO BANGLADESH'S RELATIONS WITH INDIA AS WELL AS FOR THE MATERIAL ADVANTAGES OF RESUMED TRADE. WITH REPRIATION FAMILIES WILL BE REUNITED AND BADLY NEEDED CIVIL SERVANTS AND MILITARY PERSONNEL WILL BE AVAILABLE TO BDG. THESE BLESSINGS ARE MIXED. MANY BENGALLEES ARE ALREADY WONDERING HOW SUCH A LARGE NUMBER OF THEIR COUNTRYMEN CAN BE ABSORBED AND AT WHAT COST TO THOSE THERE. EVEN THOUGH MOST RETURNEES HAVE BEEN INTEGRATED WE HAVE REPORTS OF CIVIL SERVANTS WITH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TEMPORARY ASSIGNMENTS AND POLITICAL INFLUENCE BLOCKING APPOINTMENTS OF SEVERAL OF THE MORE COMPETENT OFFICIALS WHO ESCAPED FROM PAKISTAN. WITH THOUSANDS MORE RETURNING, THE PROBLEM OF INTEGRATION WILL INTENSIFY. FURTHERMORE, MUJIB WHO INSTINCTIVELY FEARS AN INDEPENDENT MILITARY MAY NOT BE AT ALL HAPPY WITH THE RETURN OF COMPETENT OFFICERS AND THE INCREASE IN THE SIZE OF HIS REGULAR ARMED FORCES.

4. WHERE THERE IS CRITICISM OF THE AGREEMENT, IT IS NOT RELATED TO THE SUBSTANCE OF INDO-PAK ACCORD. SOME BENGALLEES DESCRIBE IT AS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF INDIAN MANIPULATION OF BENGALLEE AFFAIRS. OTHERS CRITICIZE THE SHEIKH FOR HAVING TAKEN SO LONG TO NEGOTIATE A SETTLEMENT AND FOR HAVING TARNISHED IN THE PROCESS BANGLADESH'S REPUTATION AS THE AGGRIEVED PARTY. A FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL CLAIMING TO REFLECT THE FEELING OF HIS COLLEAGUES, TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER AUGUST 30 HE TOOK HIS HAT OFF TO BHUTTO'S SKILL IN THE NEGOTIATIONS AND REGRETTED HIS GOVERNMENT'S INEPTITUDE.

5. KEY TO PUBLIC REACTION IS THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS TRIALS. OVER THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS WE HAVE FOUND BENGALLEES IN DACCA AND OUTSIDE INCREASINGLY FLEXIBLE ON THIS SUBJECT. THEY ARGUE THAT TIME IS HEALING WOUNDS, THAT THE NEED FOR AN UNDERSTANDING WITH PAKISTAN OUTWEIGHS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TRIALS, AND THAT DOMESTIC ISSUES LIKE LAW AND ORDER RISING PRICES, CONSUMER GOODS SHORTAGES, AND GOVERNMENT INEFFICIENCY AND CORRUPTION ARE ECLIPSING THE ISSUE OF RETRIBUTION. THEY BELIEVE THAT SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGREEMENT, THE CONSIDERABLE TIME NEEDED TO CONDUCT

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PLANNED EXCHANGES, AND THE PROBLEMS BANGLADESH WILL FACE IN ASSIMILATING SEVERAL HUNDRED THOUSAND REPATRIATES WILL FURTHER OBSCURE THE QUESTION OF TRIALS. AN INFLUENTIAL LAWYER CLOSE TO SHEIKH MUJIB WENT EVEN FURTHER AUGUST 30 IN TELLING EMBASSY OFFICERS HE HAD REASON TO BELIEVE MUJIB NEVER WANTED TRIALS BUT RAISED THE BANNER ON INDIAN AND POPULAR INSISTENCE. THE LAWYER ASKED MUJIB SOME MONTHS AGO WHY HE DID NOT ACCEPT BHUTTO'S OFFER TO RETAIN 5,000 POWS AND RELEASE THE REST. MUJIB REPLIED: WHICHEVER PRISONER HE ACCEPTED, SOME AGGRIEVED BENGALIEE WOULD RECALL A PAK OFFENDER NOT DETAINED. TIME, MUJIB SAID, WOULD BLUR MEMORIES AND DULL BITTERNESS. WHILE THIS ACCOUNT OF MUJIB'S PRIVATE THOUGHTS MAY WELL BE TRUE, WE DO NOT BELIEVE MUJIB IS YET IN A POSITION TO FORMALLY RENOUNCE TRIALS AND PROBABLY WON'T BE FOR MANY MONTHS. HE HAS MADE TOO MUCH OF THE SUBJECT TO LET IT DROP QUICKLY.

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6. IMPLEMENTING THE NEW DELHI AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE EASY AND THERE MAY BE SURPRISES AHEAD. THE PRINCIPLE OF SIMULTANEITY PRESENTS OBVIOUS PROBLEMS. FACED WITH PROBLEMS TO SOLVE, BENGALIEES HAVE SHOWN A HABIT TO TEMPORIZE AND SPIN OUT DECISIONS. AS A RESULT SIMULTANEITY AS FORESEEN IN THE NEW DELHI ACCORD OR AT LEAST THE FINE TUNING SIMULTANEITY IMPLIES WILL PROVE A DIFFICULT CONCEPT TO CARRY OUT. BDG'S CAPACITY TO TRANSPORT, RECEIVE, AND ABSORB LARGE NUMBERS OF REPATRIATES IS LIMITED. IN ADDITION TO ARRANGING INTERNATIONAL PASSAGE, BANGLADESH WILL HAVE TROUBLE FURTHER TASKING ITS ALREADY HEAVILY OVERLOADED INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS. THE BANGLADESH RED CROSS IS SMALL, FULLY EMPLOYED AND NOT EFFICIENT; THE CONCERNED GOVERNMENT OFFICES SUFFER FROM SIMILAR HANDICAPS. FINDING HOUSING, PLACES IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM, AND JOBS PRESENTS FURTHER IMPORTANT PROBLEMS. IN SHORT SIX TO NINE MONTHS MAY PROVE A CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATE OF THE TIME REQUIRED.

7. IF REPATRIATION FROM PAKISTAN WILL RAISE PROBLEMS, SELECTION AND DISPATCH OF BIHARIS AND OTHER NON-LOCALS FROM BANGLADESH IS NOT WITHOUT COMPLICATIONS. MANY NON-LOCALS WISH TO LEAVE THEIR SQUALID CAMPS AND DETENTION CENTERS BUT EXACTLY WHO WILL GO IS NOT CLEAR. AN

EMBASSY OFFICER WHO RECENTLY TOURED A NON-LOCAL INTERNMENT AREA LEARNED THAT AMONG THOSE BDG WOULD MOST LIKE TO UNLOAD, -- THE POORER AND ILLITERATE BIHARIS -- MANY PREFER THE DEVIL THEY KNOW FOR ONE THEY DON'T.

8. WHILE TOUGH AND PROLONGED NEGOTIATIONS LIE AHEAD BEFORE THE HUMANITARIAN AND POLITICAL ISSUES ARE RESOLVED, WE BELIEVE PROSPECTS FOR PROGRESS ARE REASONABLY GOOD. THE TRIALS WILL BE OF GRADUALLY DECLINING IMPORTANCE. INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE FOR SETTLEMENT IS STRONGLY FELT HERE AND IS COMING FROM A LARGER NUMBER OF SOURCES. THE FOREIGN MINISTRY REPORTS ALGERIA HAS RECENTLY JOINED THE RANKS OF THOSE OPPOSED TO THE TRIALS. ALGERIA HAS ARGUED BANGLADESH SHOULD FOLLOW HER OWN RECORD OF MAGNANIMITY AFTER ITS WAR WITH FRANCE IF BDG WANTS GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE ARABS AND A WARM RECEPTION AMONG NON-ALIGNED. EVEN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAK FOOT-DRAGGING MAY NOT DELAY PROGRESS. BADLY BURNED LAST YEAR, THE FOREIGN MINISTRY NOW REASONS UNOFFICIALLY THAT FAILURE TO ENTER THE UN THIS YEAR WILL NOT BE OF OVERWHELMING IMPORTANCE. THE UN AND ITS COMMITMENT TO UNIVERSIALITY WILL SUFFER MORE THAT BANGLADESH. DESIRE FOR SOME FORM OF ACCOMMODATION WITH MUSLIMS IN THE WEST AND RESENTMENT AGAINST INDIA ARE EVEN MORE POWERFUL FACTORS AND LEAD US TO CONCLUDE MUJIB WILL SATISFY MANY MORE BENGALLEES THAN HE WILL ALIENATE IF HE CONTINUES TO BE FLEXBILE. NEWBERRY

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